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ABSTRACT

Forensics educators should explore the implications of feminism for debate pedagogy and practice. First, the inclusion of feminist perspectives is directly related to the pedagogical goals of solving the problem of women's participation in debate and of accomplishing the task of enabling debate coaches and student debaters to become competent, ethical and compassionate arguers. The common perception of women's "trained incapacity" for argument in general is currently reflected in and wrongly perpetuated by intercollegiate debate practice. Moreover, forensics educators should attempt to remedy this problem by taking the concrete feminist steps of refusing to elevate the goal of competition above all others, by ignoring motives of combat, desire, and self-expression and encouraging the replacement of them with motives of inter-service, instruction, and self-examination and improvement. Finally, speech instruction grounded in feminist theory can foster avoidance of being too critical toward people's foolishness and encourages the belief that argument is best used in service to others by promoting participation in alternate forms of debate. (Twenty-four references are attached.) (KEH)

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Dodging the Oppositional Dynamic: A Feminist Perspective on Debate Practice

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> It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different religious traditions; hence, if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow.
>
> -Werner Weisenberg

In all the time that I have either participated in or coached intercollegiate debate, I have been constantly amazed at the innovativeness of students participating in the activity who connect differing ideas in new and interesting ways, ways which bring to light new insights for students and coaches alike. Their innovativeness constantly challenges me to seek ways in which I can pedagogically guide them to channel this creative energy not into winning, but into learning something that they can take with them beyond the competitive intercollegiate debate experience itself. I am challenged to guide them to make realizations while debating that aid them in becoming competent, ethical, and compassionate human beings after the competitive experience is long over. It is not news to argue that we should, as educators, encourage debaters to make such realizations. Yet, as far as I can tell it was debaters that first explicitly connected feminist concerns to the debate activity.

It was the debaters themselves that first introduced arguments about feminist movements and their ecological, social, and political implications as issues that deserve serious consideration. Recently, in CEDA debate, debaters have expanded the connection of feminist concerns and debate to include the

assumptive and linguistic concerns that feminist scholars have been pushing the academy to consider (Miller and Swift, 1988). They have argued for the application of nonsexist standards to the language and evidence used in actual rounds. While this is certainly not a comprehensive treatment of the central concerns of the many and varied feminisms and their relation to debate practice, it is a laudable first step.

In this paper, I intend to explore the ways in which we, as educators, should take advantage of our debaters nascent consciousness of feminist concerns. I posit that we should explore the implications of feminisms for debate pedagogy and practice. To that end, I will explore the reasons for the importance of such a connection and examine the implications of such an analysis for debate pedagogy.

> I'm 'round watchin' these things, and I wanted to come up and say these few things to you, and I'm glad of the hearin' you gave me. I wanted to tell you a mite about Women's Rights, and so I came out and said so. I am sittin' among you to watch; and every once and awhile I will come out and tell you what time of night it is (Sojourner Truth, 98).

The Importance of a Feminist Perspective on Debate

To some, the need for an intersection of feminist concerns with debate pedagogy and practice may seem all too apparent. Unfortunately, this is so because of a very pragmatic, every-day concern that we share as forensics educators; women's participation in intercollegiate debate is not nearly equal to that of men's.

According to Benda Logue, the problem is prevalent in CEDA and NDT. Women's participation in regional CEDA tournaments reflect a 14 percentage point variation from the general proportion of women to men in the overall college population. At national CEDA tournaments, women's participation reflects a 23 percentage point variation from the overall college population proportion (Logue, 69). Citing further statistical evidence, Logue also claims that CEDA provides a greater opportunity for women's participation than NDT. Logue admits that this difference is not statistically significant (68); however, it remains apparent that both CEDA and NDT are suffering from the problem of the lack of women's participation to some extent.[1]

There is a pressing need, then, to remedy the lack of women's participation in debate. However, we cannot solve this problem without exploring potential reasons for the problem's existence. The application of feminist perspectives to debate practice might shed some light on the endemic ways in which actual debate practice discourages women from participating. Feminisms are concerned with the status of women in society. Indeed, it has been said that "all feminisms are united by a commitment to improving the situation of women" (Jaggar & Rothenberg, xii). If we are to improve the situation of women in relation to debate practice, a fruitful area of scholarship to explore is feminist theory. Feminism has something to say about the exclusion of women in every field of endeavor, and it is my contention that the exclusion of women in debate is connected to this societal exclusion of women from the

public sphere.

An equally important reason for pursuing the connection between debate and feminisms is something I have alluded to in my introduction. We should, as educators, attempt to ensure that our students be able to translate their skills and knowledge gained from the debate experience into resources from which they can draw to aid them in becoming competent, ethical, and compassionate human beings in later life. In order to accomplish this goal, it is essential that we encourage our students to understand and value women's experience. Feminist theory will help us to accomplish this goal:

> "Feminist theory is fundamentally experiential. Its subject is women's lives, past or present, historically recorded or known only by inference, experienced in association with men of the dominant culture or with men who are also oppressed" (Keohane, Rosaldo, & Gelpi, vii).

Feminist theory seeks to value women's experience; hence, exposure to such ideas will encourage us to relate to a different kind of experience, a marginalized experience, one that is separate from yet integrally tied to the cultural norms that encourage us to discount the existence of oppression.

Hence, it is important to recognize that feminisms also move beyond dealing with injustices solely against women; they also take on the task of dealing with inequality and oppression in all areas of human life. Michelle Rosaldo made this point well:

> "A crucial task for feminist scholars emerges, then, not as the relatively limited one of documenting pervasive sexism as a social fact-or showing how we can how hope to change or have in the past been able to survive it. Instead, it seems that we are challenged to provide new ways of linking the particulars of women's lives,

> activities, and goals to inequalities wherever they exist" (Rosaldo, 417).

Feminist perspectives, understood in this way, can enable and empower us to promote our understanding and that of our intercollegiate debaters so necessary to the competence, ethics, and compassion we all hope to develop. To understand the experience of the marginalized is a step towards this goal.

> However novel it may appear, I shall venture the assertion, that, until women assume the place in society which good sense and good feeling alike assign to them, human improvement must advance but feebly (Wright, 22).

More specifically, feminist theories offer forensics educators a unique opportunity for improving the practice of debate. The relationship between theory and practice for feminists has been the source of much concern. For feminists, the synthesis of theory and practice is essential to the achievement of the avowedly political agenda feminists have advanced. This connection resonates with a central tenet of feminist thought, "the personal is political" (Warren, 1987, 103). Thus, the goal of applying useful theoretical concepts to explain and help solve practical problems is a central concern to most feminisms. Helen Warren has characterized this pursuit as the "practice of theory" (Warren, 103). In order to solve the problem of the lack of women's participation in debate, we must practice theory, feminist theory.

The Practice of Theory: A Feminist View of Debate Practice

To pursue the "practice of theory" as Warren has described it, I believe it is useful to take up and examine her discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's perspective on argument (Warren, 1989). According to Warren, Gilman recognized the existence of a "trained incapacity" of women for argument.[2] She posited two reasons for this: first, argument is described as a public enterprise and second, argument functions as a principle of opposition (Warren, 1989, 356). These two descriptors of argument in general apply to the practice of intercollegiate debate as well. Hence, I will argue for the appropriateness of the application of Gilman's argument to the practice of intercollegiate debate.

To explicate how argument practice in debate perpetuates this "trained incapacity" of women for argument, I will take up these reasons independently. First, I will discuss how argument described as a public enterprise tends to exclude women from its practice, and I will demonstrate how debate is viewed as a public enterprise and consequently perpetuates women's exclusion from participation. Second, I will discuss how argument functions as a principle of opposition and how the oppositional dynamic functions in intercollegiate debate. Finally, I will offer some suggestions for transcending the oppositional dynamic and examine the implications of those suggestions for debate pedagogy.

The Exclusion of Women: Argument/Debate as a Public Enterprise

Gilman argues that "argument is defined as a public enterprise, carried out according to rules of collective conduct before hearers" (Warren, 1989, 356). This creates a "trained

incapacity" in women for argument because traditionally they have been excluded from the public sphere. The public/private dichotomy that has relegated women to the private sphere is the source of much discussion among feminist scholars.

Women and women's concerns traditionally have occupied the "private sphere," relegated solely to the concerns of the family. The construct "woman" has been understood as "mother" and her nature has been described as a nurturing one (Chodrow, Dinnerstein, Rich). While it is true that women have made strides in the working world, it is also true that women do not move easily in the public sphere of political discourse.

> Women cannot be seen in public space as women citizens who act politically on their own ground, with their full being-female because the discourse of citizenship is itself gendered. The dominant conceptualization of citizenship displaces "women, their work, and the values associated with that work from the culturally normative definitions of objectivity, morality, citizenship, and even, of human nature" (Keller, 13) (Jones, 782).

Thus, the exclusion of women from the public space occurs despite the attempts of women to break down the private/public distinction barring them from participation in public argument because the discourse of citizenship itself is gendered. Argument as a public enterprise is difficult for women to engage in because the standards for participation in it devalue women's experience.

In our own field, we have been reminded of how this exclusion of women's communication occurs by Spitzack and Carter (1987) who overview the kinds of communication research that is by and about women. The reasons why researchers devalue women's communication

identified by Spitzack and Carter in many ways parallel reasons why women's communication is devalued in general. Spitzack and Carter offer a five-part typology for understanding groupings of communication research by and about women. As part of this typology, they describe "Womanless Communication." Womanless Communication is communication research that ignores women almost entirely. Campbell in a study of speech anthologies and Foss and Foss in a study of published communication articles by and about women both posit that there is a clear underrepresentation of women.

Spitzack and Carter argue that there are several reasons for this neglect. First, communication scholars have typically found issues of politics and power in the public sphere to be topics that are interesting. This tends to exclude women and others who traditionally have not wielded much power in the public sphere. In addition, stereotypes of women's communication as somehow inferior or powerless has meant that women's communication is somehow less interesting. These observations about the exclusion of women from communication research sheds light on Warren's premise that women's trained incapacity for argument excludes them from the public sphere.

Women as a marginalized group traditionally have not wielded much power; as a result women's communication has been labeled as powerless and therefore uninteresting. This devaluation of women's communication in the public sphere has perpetuated the public/private dichotomy. When women attempt to break the barriar

of the public/private distinction, and enter into public discourse, their speech is labeled powerless and uninteresting. In turn, their exclusion from the public sphere manifests itself in the exclusion of women from argumentation practice altogether because argumentation has been defined traditionally as a public enterprise.

This premise applied to intercollegiate debate may not be immediately acceptable to those of us who can recall association with women in debate who are or were examples of excellence to all of us. It is not my purpose here to discount their distinction. Yet, it is essential to understand that the existence of "Great Women Debaters" does not undercut this premise. Spitzack and Carter made the point well in the second part of their essay entitled "Great Woman Speakers" where they characterize research on just that, great woman speakers. This research recognizes the influence of great women on the public sphere and attempts to demonstrate that women too can be powerful and contribute to society. Yet, Spitzack and Carter, I think rightly, caution that the study of great women speakers may serve to perpetuate traditional and unfair standards for the judgement of greatness that will continue to exclude most women from communication research. This is analogous to describing women as "women attorneys" or "women professors" for such a description while recognizing that women have entered those professions still defines the profession as male-dominated by requiring the adjective "woman" to make its meaning clear.

I think their cautionary tale should warn us not to make the same error in intercollegiate debate. Just because there are or have been "Great Women Debaters" does not mean that we can discount the severity of the problem of the lack of women's participation in debate. In other words, we should not fail to eliminate practices which tend to exclude most women from participating in intercollegiate debate simply because some women have overcome those exclusionary practices. If we fail to eliminate such practices because there are and have been "Great Women Debaters," we will only perpetuate unfair standards for the judgement of greatness.

It is my contention that the lack of women's participation stems from the fact that intercollegiate debate is described as and justified by the idea that it is a public enterprise or it prepares students for argument in the public sphere. First, intercollegiate debate is often understood by analogy as a public enterprise. While it is true that debates are no longer conducted for broad audiences, it is also true that debates are "carried out according to rules of collective conduct before hearers," (Warren, 1989, 356) and our understanding of it is based heavily on a legal analogy. It is no accident, I think, that so many of our students go on to pursue law degrees. However, this point requires further explanation.

Structurally, debate is understood in many ways through a legal analogy. For example, our terminology reflects the importance of the legal analogy. Such terms as burden of proof,

presumption, and prima-facie case provide clear examples of such influence. Also, our reliance on appeals to authority is analogous to legal reliance on case precedent. Most obviously, however, debaters are advocates arguing in front of a judge just as attorneys are advocates arguing in front of a judge. The "impartiality" or "neutrality" of that judge concerning the arguments in the debate has come to be an expectation for debate critics just as it is for jurists. The point is that law is a most public enterprise and our understanding of debate practice is heavily influenced by this public enterprise.[3]

Second, many pedagogical justifications of debate are based on the idea that debate prepares or should prepare students for argument in the public sphere. Many examples of this abound. Drawing upon various authors' opinions, Colbert and Biggers offered three justifications for the usefulness of intercollegiate debate that educators could marshall in defence of funding for the activity in the face of institutional financial pressures(Colbert & Biggers, 1985). Each of these justifications reflect the assumption that debaters are better prepared than their collegiate counterparts to engage in argument in the public sphere.[4]

Recent complaints about NDT debate moving away from a public speaking orientation might lead some to take exception to my claim. However, as Rowland and Deatherage point out

> Debate is now aimed at sharpening the research, critical thinking and organizational skills of students so that they can become effective advocates before government commissions, courts, and other decision-making bodies (247, emphasis mine).

Even if we agree that debate is moving away from its public speaking orientation, that should not lead us to believe that debate's form of argumentation presently is not justified by the importance of argumentation as a public enterprise. The justification for debate not designed to promote traditional public speaking skills is now justified on the basis of preparing advocates to argue before specialized decision-making bodies. These decision-making bodies are still located in thepublic sphere. Thus, the justification for debate is still centered on the idea of argument as a public enterprise.

The problem with this is that debate, understood as an activity centered in the public sphere, reflects the exclusion of women from that sphere. The existence of women's "trained incapacity" for argumentation is based in part on argument defined as a public enterprise. To point out that women have traditionally excluded from the public sphere is not an adequate explanation of why it that exclusion continues. It is important to understand that <u>why</u> women continue to be excluded from argument in the public sphere. To this end, I turn to Gilman's second reason for women's "trained incapacity" for argument; argument functions as a principle of opposition.

Argument/Debate as a Principle of Opposition

According to Gilman, argument is understood as winning or losing a battle of words. Argumentation is a "wordy war" that is nothing more than the sublimation of the more lethal pursuits of physical combat. Warren argues with support from Gilman:

> "Being civilized, in part, we must arrange a sort of 'civilized warfare,' and learn to play the game, the old, crude, fierce game of combat"(June 1910 22). So it is that the game of argument is cast as a battle or struggle in which one assails an adversary and the most important thing is to win (Warren, 1989, 357).

This game is a masculine game. Lethal warfare has always been the province of men (e.g. men rather than women are soldiers in combat; the military is predominantly run by men), and when argumentation is understood through a combat metaphor, the predominance of male participation continues. Hence, problem of the opposition principle in argumentation is a problem of confuting of the terms masculine with human (Warren, 1989, 357).

This confuting of terms places women in permanent opposition to the standard norm of "humanness." This principle of opposition is problematic for women because women have been taught to be non-oppositional. Culturally, opposition is defined as a masculine trait; whereas, non-opposition is thought to be feminine. More importantly, for those who have come a long way in transcending the cultural norm, participation in argumentation is still problematic because women have been defined as "other" from man precisely because of the dualistic tendency of the principle of opposition itself.

Acceptance of the principle of opposition, then, presents a paradox for women who are seeking to transcend the limitations of culturally defined roles. To embrace a principle that tends to exclude oneself from the public sphere is a difficult accomplishment. This oppositional dynamic perpetuates the

public/private distinction that tends to exclude women from argumentation.

> I love man as my fellow; but his sceptre, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man (Wollstonecraft, 12).

The oppositional dynamic may manifest itself in debate in different ways. One way that debaters themselves have recognized and attempted to debunk this oppositional dynamic is to condemn the the common use of sexist language. Studies have demonstrated that there are significant exclusionary effects on women from the use of sexist language (Martyna; Spender). Just as important, however, is the celebration in debate of the principle of opposition. This problematic manifests itself in intercollegiate debate due to our tendency to celebrate the competitive aspects of the activity over and above all others. The bottom line for many appears to be win-loss records at sanctioned tournaments. It becomes our task as educators, then, to find a solution to this problem.

The Transcendence of Opposition: Implications for Debate Pedagogy

In seeking this solution, I turn to Warren's description of Gilman's transcendence of the principle of opposition and suggest that it holds some insights for forensics educators. For Gilman, transcendence of the principle of opposition occurs when one is able to conceive of an "interesting game of honest argument."

> "This 'honest' game is not a compensatory feminine fame, not a taming of argument by an opposite or superior 'feminine influence,' but a game built upon and evocative of the common human capacities men and women share"

(Warren, 1989, 358).

The purposes of the honest game of argument are twofold: the teaching of other minds and the "cleaning" of one's own mind (Warren, 1989, 358). I believe that forensics educators can translate these two purposes into a philosophy of coaching that would better achieve our pedagogical goals. Translated, these purposes might read: teach our students respect for their opponents and promote the openness of mind that recognizes the mutuality of exchange in argument.

To teach students respect for their opponents and to promote openness of mind probably do not appear to be very controversial goals. Yet, it is important to understand that my claim is that we should elevate these goals <u>above competition.</u> Hence, the issue of motives is involved. Transcendence of the principle of opposition ignores motives of combat, desire, and self-expression and replaces them with motives of inter-service, instruction, and self-examination and improvement (Warren, 1989, 358).

To this end, we should, as educators, avoid being too critical of people's foolishness and teach our students to do the same. We should encourage the belief that argument is best used in service to others by promoting participation in alternate forms of debate. Most important, however, I think it is demonstrable that intercollegiate debate suffers from this overemphasis on the principle of opposition. It is up to us to ensure that the most important goal is not winning. The most important goal is to embrace the mutuality of exchange that is argument with an openness

of mind that promotes respect for opponents and encourages the vulnerability of oneself to other points of view. After all, isn't the point of having to defend positions that you do not believe in to force you to give adequate hearing to both sides of the issue?

Finally, I should note that in part, the institutional structure of the University system may be responsible. In our pursuit of limited resources, more and more, we are forced to justify the existence of the activity, and it seems as if winning trophies is an easy way to do just that. Hence, it becomes our task to convince our deans of the importance of the activity over and above the bottom line of winning and losing.

The interesting thing about promoting this particular pedagogical philosophy it that it could go a long way toward breaking down the public/private distinction. By eliminating the paradox of the principle of opposition, woman will no longer be defined as the non-oppositional other in debate. By eliminating the paradox of the principle of opposition, man will no longer be the oppositional norm. They will strive to participate in an activity that seeks to aid then both in becoming competent, ethical, and compassionate human beings after the competitive experience is long over. They will carry the debunking of the public/private distinction with them into their adult lives. They will value both women's and men's experience and promote a belief in the "humanness" of us all.

In sum, I have argued for the importance of a feminist perspective on the intercollegiate debate activity by exploring its

relationship to the pedagogical goals of solving the problem of women's participation in debate and of accomplishing the task of enabling ourselves and our debaters to become competent, ethical and compassionate arguers. I have offered the claim that Warren's analysis of the existence of women's "trained incapacity" for argument in general is reflected in and perpetuated by intercollegiate debate practice. Finally, I have suggested that we as educators should attempt to remedy this problem by taking the concrete steps of refusing to elevate the goal of competition above all others, by ignoring motives of combat, desire, and self-expression and encouraging the replacement of them with motives of inter-service, instruction, and self-examination and improvement. I have suggested that we avoid being too critical of people's foolishness and teach our students to do the same and that we should encourage the belief that argument is best used in service to others by promoting participation in alternate forms of debate.

This is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the relevance of feminisms to debate practice. There are numerous directions for further research and discussion of this connection. For example, the linguistic implications that our debaters have challenged us to consider remain to be pursued. Debate is obviously a linguistic activity based in the public sphere, and many feminists make the claim that the language of the public sphere is itself engendered. This potentail area of exploration and many others are unfortunately beyond the introductory scope of this paper. However, I hope that I have provided some of the groundwork for the

legitimacy of these pursuits.

> The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education, for the full development of her faculties, her forces of mind and body; for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear; is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life (Stanton, 158).

Notes

1.This evidence was provided in 1985. I could not locate more recent statistics on women's participation levels but I suspect from my own experience that it has not changed much. This indicates the need for further research by scholars in this area.

2.I should point out that this is Warren's choice of terms, not Gilman's. Warren justifies the explanatory power of Veblen's (Veblen, 1957) term as "embroidered upon" by Kenneth Burke. "Trained incapacity" is defined as "that state of affairs whereby one's very abilities function as blindness (Burke, 1954, 7). I would like to add that I believe this to be a very optimistic choice of terminology because as Warren points out, Burke argues that it "helps us to observe in the medium of communication simultaneously both the defects of its qualities and the qualities of its defects" (Burke, 1954, p.49). It also underscores an important point I am trying to make in this paper; we as educators can have a great deal of influence to the end of solving the problem of women's participation in debate by attempting to "untrain" this incapacity.

3.At this point, some would argue that debate is not exclusively based on a legal analogy. Certainly, this is true. The existence of debates over appropriate paradigms and judging philosophy demonstrate this truth. Yet, other perspectives reflect the idea of debate as a public enterprise as well. For example, a policy-making paradigm has the judge adopt the stance of the lawmaker and certainly lawmaking is a public enterprise.

4.The first justification, "debate improves communication skills," was based in part on a survey of legislators. Hence, even though the claim was meant to include group communication skills, it is clear that, at least in part, debate practice is justified on the basis of its improvement of group communication skills in the public sphere. The second justification, "debate promotes depth of educational experience," relies heavily on the importance of critical thinking skills in order to make collective decisions. They quote Ehninger and Brockriede at length: "The function of debate is to enable men to make collective choices and decisions critically when inferential questions become subjects for dispute.... When collective choices and decisions require personal judgment as well as facts and figures, debate helps insure that these decisions will be made critically.... A critical decision is more 'human,' i.e., rational, than an uncritical one. The ability to arrive at decisions critically is the trait that chiefly distinguishes man from animal." (1963, 15) The third justification, "debate is excellent pre-professional preparation," clearly promotes the importance of communication skills in the public sphere.

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